Flanagan or Sater - Int. 2879



## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Des 4/26

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release APRIL 25, 1956

## FWS BAGS RECORD NUMBER OF MARKET HUNTERS

With the biggest bag of market hunters in the history of the Fish and Wildlife Service enforcement program either now in custody or out on bond, Service officials are "catching up the loose ends" of the big job.

According to Acting Secretary of the Interior Clarence A. Davis, 53 warrants were issued for game law violators who have taken an estimated 100,000 ducks and geese from the Beaumont-Houston-Galveston area in Texas during the past two years. Forty-four of these were arrested and arraigned on April 18 and 19, three are known to have left the State and six others are still being sought by State and Federal officials.

The sweeping action in the Houston area—more than two years in the making—far outdistances the big Fish and Wildlife Service raids of recent years—the one at Reelfoot, Tenneessee, a few months ago which resulted in the arrest of 18, and the raid in Sacramento Valley, California, in March of 1954 which also landed 18 poachers.

Market hunters, Fish and Wildlife Service officials say, are extremely hard to catch. Picking them up one at a time would result only in making others more careful. Hence the slow and arduous task of getting enough evidence on enough violators to merit mass arrests which catch all or nearly all of the violators before many can get away or destroy valuable evidence.

The pattern of market hunting varies, officials say, but generally there is either a working agreement among the poachers of an area or at least a comradeship which permits the establishment of a "tip-off" system for real or imagined danger. In some instances the poachers are well enough organized to have outriders patrolling the area in which the illegal shooting is being done.

Unfortunately, the market for illegal ducks and geese is large, Service officials say. Generally the best markets are with clubs operated by persons who see

no moral or actual crime in violating the game laws, and with individuals who are willing to wink at the law to get unusually large numbers of wildfowl for big parties or other social occasions. Then there is still another market composed of persons who like to eat ducks and geese but who prefer to purchase the birds rather than go out and hunt them.

As one Fish and Wildlife Service official stated, "If there was not a good market for these illegal birds these fellows could not make any money shooting more than their limits, or shooting out of hours or out of season. It is hard to understand why some of these folks—often the cream of local society—do not comprehend that what they are doing is actually stealing that many ducks from the people of the Nation. These birds belong to all of us—they can be harvested according to rules which are fair to all of us—and none of us has any right to participate in or condone operations which amount to nothing short of theft of public property."

There were United States Game Management Agents from eight States, 12 Texas State game wardens and several United States Marshalls engaged in the recent clean-up of market hunters in Texas. These men operated under the direction of L. T. Merovka, Regional Supervisor of Game Management Agents for the Fish and Wildlife Service at Albuquerque, New Mexico.

xxx